

**Washington Association for Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention**  
**Thurston County TOGETHER**  
**February 16, 2015 (as prepared)**

Thank you all for coming to Olympia to make your voices heard on behalf of substance abuse and violence prevention. Your presence and advocacy work is always appreciated in these halls.

What a time we are living in! And what a job we have!

Personally, I don't quite get it. Over the past two to three years the collective "we" in this state – that is the voters and even members of the Legislature – have done nothing but make it easier for young adults, and especially youth, to get their hands, alcohol, marijuana and other harmful substances.

First we passed an initiative that more than triples the access points for spirit sales plus increasing the hours of availability. Then we passed another initiative to create a retail sales market for recreational marijuana, adding to the already existing black market and medical marijuana market. As we do this the perception of harm goes down, and with that we know that usage goes up.

So pot is available everywhere. You don't have to drive very far at all to see a green cross advertising medical marijuana, which remains highly unregulated in this state. Or, if you are 21, you can walk right into stores with names like Ganja Goddess, Caesar's Salad or even The Joint and take your pick of edibles, drinkables or smokeables.

As you have no doubt seen in the media, many of these mind-altering products look and taste a lot like candy. But those who sell pot are not trying to capture the youth market, right? Powdered alcohol is already out there and could make its way to Washington. Electronic vape products can be purchased just about anywhere and are commonly confiscated in our schools.

Several legislators have sponsored bills related to marijuana and spirit sales. One would relax laws that would make the gifting of an ounce of pot okay. Another would lower the legal age of retail sales clerks who can sell alcohol. There is a bill that would allow for home delivery of marijuana. There is lots of legislation that seeks to combine the medical and recreational marijuana market into one and the same.

Given the harm to many individuals and societal harm caused by the acceptance and relaxation of laws related to alcohol, marijuana and other intoxicating substances, it's quite insane, if you ask me. Thank goodness there are advocates like you who are willing to come to Olympia to try to add balance and perspective to this important fight against drugs.

We are facing a crisis not only by opening the doors to greater sales of alcohol and marijuana, but also by lowering the perception of harm for other harmful substances. As you all know the theft and abuse of prescription drugs is rampant. Abuse of prescription drugs, experts tell us, often escalates to even stronger, cheaper drugs like heroin.

There was a conference that one of my staff members attended at the University of Washington last week where professionals from law enforcement, public policy and the prevention world came together to discuss the growing prevalence of black tar heroin in our state, most of which is smuggled up by money-hungry and dangerous drug cartels from the poppy fields of southern Mexico.

My staffer heard a gripping story by longtime broadcast journalist Penny LeGate who lost her daughter to heroin in 2012. Her daughter, Marah, was raised in a loving home with every opportunity in the world yet still fell into the trap of addiction and died way too young. There have been about 8,000 deaths caused by opiate overdoses in Washington alone since the turn of the century. Far more people die every year from drug overdoses each year in our state than from car crashes, yet we keep on making drugs easier to obtain.

Meth, which used to be manufactured in kitchens and back-yard labs in our state, is now largely produced by super labs in Mexico and trafficked to Washington by those same cartels. As terrible as it sounds, you cannot blame those evil drug gangs for simply meeting market demands being created here.

People are losing their lives over this stuff, and families are being torn apart. We know that drug addiction and use contributes to homelessness, to domestic violence and mental health issues. Some of you are involved in this cause because you have first-hand experience in the outcomes of substance abuse. Others are here just because you care.

What we need to do is take our communities back from this scourge. We need to make it harder, not easier, for our youth to obtain alcohol and marijuana. As a state and in our communities we need to continue to support efforts to reduce the availability of prescription drugs, heroin and other illicit substances. Thank you for caring enough to be here.

I would now like to spend a little time telling you, from my perspective, how you can be effective in Olympia, then take a few of your questions.

- Best lobbyist a citizen
- Partisan politics
- Communicate early and often
- Track process
- Stories:
  - o Law Enforcement Memorial
  - o Seahawks plate

*Closing:* Thank you again for all that you do throughout the year for the cause of substance abuse and violence prevention. This organization is making a difference by providing another perspective for communities, for the Legislature, for educators and for parents. I believe that your work here is critical, and would invite you to keep coming to Olympia and stay involved throughout the session.

The saying of “it’s the squeaky wheel that gets the grease” applies fully to the legislative process. Please make a lot of noise today. Tell them there is an alternative. Tell them you are serious about using the legislative process to advocate for fewer deaths due to alcohol and substance abuse. Your voice is very important!

Thank you for using it.